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NSC BRIEFING

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LAOS

- I. Laos has again become focal point of tension in Southeast Asia with flare-up of localized fighting in Sam Neua province where government military outposts attacked by former troops of the Communist Pathet Lao movement.
  - A. Attacking Pathet guerrilla forces reportedly augmented by local pro-Commie tribesmen, "volunteers" from adjacent North Vietnam, and perhaps elements of recently mutinied 2nd Pathet Lao battalion
    1. This spring the 2nd Pathet Lao battalion mutinied and fled--reportedly to North Vietnam--to avoid integration into Royal Laotian Army.
- II. Action began with skirmishes about two weeks ago, but owing to poor communications, government became aware of situation only in last few days.
  - A. Laotian premier says several remote army outposts have fallen; government is concerned that Sam Neua town, with vital airport, may be early target.
    1. Are unconfirmed reports that two guerrilla groups approaching Sam Neua town from the east and the north.
  - B. Several minor attacks on government forces in other provinces but could be intended as diversion from Sam Neua province.
- III. Government has two infantry battalions (about 1,200 men) in Sam Neua province.
  - A. One paratroop company has been sent by air to Sam Neua town and two more are scheduled. Two additional infantry companies

- B. Government forces widely scattered; heaviest concentration of several hundred regular troops stationed in Sam Neua town.
  - C. Pathet Lao strength now in province estimated to total about 1,000 men.
  - D. On Wednesday, Lao government arrested ten Neo Lao Hak Zat leaders (pro-Communist party) including Prince Souphannouvong (former Pathet Lao leader).
- IV. No evidence of direct North Vietnamese participation in the attacks, but the action was at least directed by Hanoi and probably coordinated with Peiping, and possibly Moscow.
- A. President Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam has been in USSR since 2 July ostensibly at Black Sea resort on Vacation.
  - B. A Laotian government communique charges North Vietnamese participation in the attacks.
- V. Most likely reason for the Pathet Lao attacks is to create international pressures for the return of the International Control Commission (ICC) to Laos--as protection for local Communist movement which is increasingly repressed by Lao Government.
- A. In recent months, Communist Bloc has been clamoring for return of ICC--gruce body established in 1954 in Geneva and which left Laos last year.
  - B. Bloc can also use situation to call international attention to presence of US military training personnel in Laos.
    - 1. On 24 July, unleashed heavy propaganda attack charging introduction of US training mission is an attempt to "expand civil war" and threatens peace in Indochina.

**VI. No firm indication yet these attacks foreshadow resumption civil war in other 11 provinces, but situation explosive; Phong Saly, the other former Communist-held province, would be likely target.**

**A. While preparations for a North Vietnamese military intervention in Laos could be made rapidly and without notice, available information provides no evidence at this time that major military operations beingplanned.**